BABU SURENDRANATH BANNERJEA

HIS LIFE AND CAREER

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His Life and Career.

In the long roll of eminent Indians who have been doing yeoman service in the cause of the political uplifting of the people of this country, no one is better known or more sincerely loved than the Bengal patriot, Babu Surendranath Bannerjea. We have had in the short space of time of half-a-century during which a political consciousness has been awakened in the country many Indians who have distinguished themselves by their brilliant intellect, force of character, keen political insight and disinterested patriotism; but scarcely any one of these has equalled Mr. Bannerjea in carrying the love and esteem of all classes of his countrymen, prince or peasant, high or low, with the solitary exception of Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji. Mr. Bannerjea's name is a household word throughout India from Mandalay to Peshawar, from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas. All eyes turn to him as the nation's idol, the brightest jewel among Indian Congressmen.

To what is this singular hold which Mr. Bannerjea possesses over the vast multitudes of his fellow-countrymen due? Is there anything striking about his personality that the very mention of his name casts a spell over men's minds? He has not been deported, nor has he been convicted of sedition—two remarkable distinctions which the short-sighted bureaucracy confers in the plenitude of power upon unwelcome critics. Mr. Bannerjea has not the honour of having been abused into notoriety by devices which are the results of panic as well as of folly. Ever since he entered public life he has acquired and retained for himself a position in the front rank of our leaders.

The man in the street when asked what the secret of Mr. Bannerjea's hold on him is would reply that his place is due to a magnificent and exuberant oratory of which he is so profound a master and in which he has scarcely an equal among Indian public speakers. That Mr. Bannerjea is the greatest of Indian orators no one who has heard him once will deny. To have heard him once is to forget him never. As one hears the short-statured, quaintly-dressed, silver-tongued orator

from the Congress platform, pouring forth his brilliant and fast flowing periods, like unto the fall of a cataract, swaying by the magnificence of his oration no less than by his moral fervour and earnestness, critical audiences of many hundreds and thousands,—as one sees him sway the multitude as does a great tragedian the feelings and emotions of his audiences, the man of emotion no less than the man of intellect abandons himself for once, and permits himself to be completely bound by the magic of the orator's spell. What Demosthenes is to the Greeks, Cicero to the Romans, Mirabeau to the French, Burke, Sheridan, and Gladstone are to the English, that Mr. Banerjea is to the Indians, and so long as English literature lasts in India, so long will Mr. Bannerjea's orations continue to be largely read and re-read by warm admirers who will turn to it as to a treasure-house of sublime eloquence, a fountain of true inspiration.

But if any one should say that Mr. Bannerjea's title to fame rests solely upon the magnificence of his oratory, he robs him of half his worth. That has a broader foundation than the power of his eloquence, however

sublime. It must be said to consist, we believe, in the perfect accord which his life shows with his professed tenets, and the singular patriotism and disinterestedness which in every stage of his life have marked his own personal activities. His patriotism is not of the kind which blooms like the proverbial aloe once in a year and closes soon after the delivery of a speech from the Congress platform. On the contrary he is a consistent worker, one who from day to day, from week to week, carries on his propaganda through good report and through ill report, heedless of the consquences that may accrue. In fact he is patriotism personified. It is to the strenuous life which he leads, the continuous work which he turns out, ever ready as he is to take his place where duty's bugles sound for him, that Mr. Bannerjea's hold on the affections of his countrymen is due.

Within the short space allowable for a sketch it is impossible to give a biographical account of one who is certainly the hero of a hundred battles; only a brief sketch is here attempted. Mr. Bannerjea was born in November 1848. His grandfather held an

appointment in the Salt department under the Bengal Board of Revenue. His father Durga Charan Bannerjea was reputed to be one of the ablest of Allopathetic and medical practitioners in Bengal. He was the second among five sons. He was first sent to a pathasala for education, and at the age of seven he was taken to the Doveton College, an institution chiefly directed to the education of European and Eurasian youths, and this circumstance must have greatly added to his proficiency in English. In his fifteenth year he appeared for the Entrance Examination, with Latin as his second language and was placed in the first class. He secured a Junior Scholarship and appeared for the First examination in Arts in which also he was placed in the first class. He graduated in 1868, but his failure to secure equal distinction in this is attributed to two serious attacks of fever prior to his examination.

It is a remarkable circumstance that some of the prominent leaders of the Indian progressive movement have had brilliant academic careers; and Mr. Bannerjea like his fellow workers A. M. Bose, K. T. Telang, Pherozeshah Mehta

and others, had a brilliant academic career. Mr. Sime, Principal of the Doveton College, who had ample opportunities to judge what stuff his young pupil was made of, suggested that Mr. Bannerjea should be sent up to England to compete for the Civil Service. It was not a suggestion which orthodox Bengalee Brahmin parents would easily adopt. Eventually Mr. Sime's view prevailed and Mr. Bannerjea left India on the 3rd March 1868. It was not however all smooth sailing with him. Objection was taken to his competing for the examination on the ground of his having passed the prescribed age limit. In the end the objection was waived. Mr. Bannarjea had the peculiar privilege of being trained in English under the distinguished scholar and Professor Henry Morley and in Sanskrit under the equally capable guidance of Professor Goldstrucker. Along with three other Indians, Romesh Chander Dutt, Behari Lal Gupta and Sreepad Babaji Thakoor, he appeared for the examination in 1869, and was placed in the pass-list. He was posted to Bengal in September 1871. He lost his father a few weeks before his appointment.

The Indian bureaucracy is always ill-served in its men and there seems to be a fatality about it, that its best men are few and these few do not serve it long. If Mr. Bannerjea had been allowed to continue in the service how much the bureaucracy would have gained and how much the popular party would have lost! He was not fated to be tied to the desk. His place was in the forum. After two years of service he was confronted with grave charges by the Government and a *purda* commission of enquiry was appointed which held its sittings outside Calcutta, in spite of Mr. Bannerjea's request that the enquiry should be held in Calcutta in full view of the public. Mr. Bannerjea went again to England to place his case before the British public and to plead for redress. Before he reached England, the commission had done its work. Mr. Bannerjea was removed from service and was allowed a consolatory pension of Rs. 50 per month. But more brilliant work awaited his home-coming, a disappointed suitor before the British public.

What the bureaucracy lost, the public were not slow to profit by. On his return from England, Mr. Bannerjea joined the collegiate staff of the

Metropolitan Institution, and a few years later also joined the staff of the Free Church College. In 1882 he started a school of his own with a hundred students. That the Ripon College of to-day is one of the few best-conducted indigenous institutions in all India and attracts students from all parts of Bengal, is soley due to the distinguished efforts of its founder assisted by a capable staff. If Mr.Bannerjea had done nothing else to his country than train year after year hundreds of capable, honest and efficient young men, with will and energy to serve the country to the best of their powers, that in itself would have ranked him as one of our greatest benefactors. Mr. St. Luke, the writer in *Capital* under the nom-de-plume of "Max", who paid a visit to the college last year along with Mr. Keir Hardie, expressed himself as being so surprised with the behaviour of the students, that he scarcely could understand how Bengalee students could be said to behave in the way police cases against them credited them with doing. If the behaviour of Mr. Bannerjea's students was exceptional, the credit due to him is all the more. No better service can be done to this country at present than that of training young men in the noble paths

of virtue, honesty, rectitude and discipline. It is easy to pervert young minds with impossible ideals and doubtful principles of moral courage. It is harder to win for them the certificate "Max" has given to Mr. Bannerjea's students.

Mr. Bannerjea's work was not however confined to the school-room. He was destined not only to train the young, but his destiny led him also to instruct the old. He took charge of the *Bengalee* newspaper, founded by the late Woomesh Chander Bannerjea and continued to edit it with conspicuous ability. A little incident occurred just twenty five years ago which showed the mettle of which the young journalist was made. A Judge of the High Court had ordered the production of an idol as evidence in a case, which act of profanity Mr. Bannerjea attacked with more enthusiasm than discretion. He was charged with having committed an act of contempt of Court. He was prepared to do the *amende honorable*; but a majority of the Judges sentenced him to two months' imprisonment. The case excited profound interest and on his release Mr. Bannerjea was the recipient of a signal ovation. The *Bengalee* has never wavered in its criticism of Government which however was

always couched in a spirit of dignity and moderation, rare in the annals of Bengalee journalism. Its judicious comments won for it a large clientele and the increasing interest evinced by the constituents enabled its conductors to turn it into a daily newspaper. Its commercial success and popularity is evidenced by the fact that it is the only Indian paper which subscribes for Reuter's telegrams direct.

Although the press was the best vehicle for instructing the populace, corporate public work demanded the formation of an organisation. In 1871, was started, among others by the late A. M. Bose and Mano Mohun Ghose, the Indian Association of which Mr. Bannerjea became the life and soul. A sad incident occurred on the day of the formation of the Association which brings into bold relief the sterling patriotism of Mr. Bannerjea. He lost his only son on the morning of that day; yet he attended the meeting in the evening and delivered one of his best speeches in support of its formation. Such sacrifice and devotion are rare in the annals of our public life and reflect considerably to his credit. Ever since its formation the Association has

been a potent factor in the making of public life in Bengal and beyond doubt no small portion of its success is due to the active exertions of Mr. Bannerjea. As Secretary of the Association he has had to send up a number of memorials to Government on the questions of the day and they bear the impress of his close grasp of the problems he has handled. The Indian Association of Calcutta, the Presidency Association of Bombay and the Mahajana Sabha of Madras are the three foremost political bodies that keep alive and sustain what little of constitutional agitation there is an opening for.

But the political organisation with which he was more closely connected and whose history cannot be written without giving due prominence to his labours, is undoubtedly the Indian National Congress. Mr. Bannerjea had not the honor of being one of the founders of that Institution. That honor was left to others, to Woomesh Chunder Bannerjee, Dadabhai Naoraji, A. O. Hume and the rest. He was not even present at the first Congress held at Bombay. But he joined it the next year and ever since he has not failed to attend even a single session of the Congress.

In the early days of the Congress he invariably spoke on the question of the expansion of the Legislative Councils. In the initial stage of the movement the belief seems to have been generally entertained that the ills of India were due to the non-representative character of the legislative assemblies, and great prominence was given to that question in preference to many others which are certainly more vital and of far greater importance than that. This is not to say that the agrarian, fiscal and industrial problems of the country were ignored; but if the legislative councils were expanded and if educated Indians were taken into the confidence of the Government, it was believed that greater opportunities would be given to the Government to know the popular mind and that they would shape their policy accordingly. The question therefore of the expansion of the legislative assemblies occupied a foremost place in the Congress programme and Mr. Surendranath Bannerjea was the annual spokesman on that subject.

We have referred to two visits which Mr. Bannerjea made to England; two more have to be recorded. In our view the most important

work he did to his country was the visit that he paid to England in 1890 as a member of the Deputation sent by the Congress to carry on the agitation for the expansion of the Legislative Councils. Mr Bannerjea addressed a large number of meetings throughout England. The Indian Parliamentary Committee, which was responsible for the arrangements, tried as far as possible to arrange for meetings on non-party lines. But it was found that the "Imperialists" gave them the go by and the audience were mostly Liberal. His meetings were presided over by men like Justin McCarthy and most of the important Liberal organisations in the provinces gave him a hearing. Of the impression left by him on his hearers the following may suffice :—

Mr. F. Stonley Johnstone.

Before resuming his seat he said that he could not sit down without expressing his admiration of the magnificent speech they had had that night from Principal Bannerjea. Its felicitious language, its eloquence, its earnest enthusiasm, and its dignified and stately delivery compelled him to say that he had rarely, if ever, heard it surpassed at any of their meetings.

Taunton Echo.

When I heard Mr. Bannerjea speak I was surprised, startled, electrified. The English was pure, the pronunciation perfect, the rhetoric a pattern of style and ability, and the address as a whole one that well deserved the applause with which it was greeted. We are accustomed to good speaking in Taunton, but we have seldom had the privilege of listening to a grander oration more ably delivered than that with which our friend from the far East favoured us on Monday evening.

South Wales Daily News.

It may surely be now admitted that India has at last found a voice in Cardiff. Had the inhabitants of the town had the slightest conception of the powerful and magnificent eloquence of Surendra Nath Bannerjea, the learned Principal of the Ripon College, at Calcutta, no hall would have been capacious enough to contain the crowd that would have struggled to get within the sound of his voice. His speech, if fully reported, could not fail to charm, to enlighten, and even to convince, but the impassioned delivery, revealing at

one and the same time, the accomplished orator and the true patriot, combined with the grace of language to carry every word to every heart. We can hardly imagine those who heard it ever forgetting it.

A Workman and democrat [Eleusis Club Meeting, Chelsea.] It gives me, a workman and democrat, sincere pleasure to see that India is taking such action, that will, I feel sure, end in their demands being granted, and how wonderfully happy in their selection has been the National Congress in such an able advocate as Mr. Bannerjea. I am sure, sir, there were members present deeply impressed by his eloquence and the lucidity of his explanation and answers to the many questions submitted to him. And all must have felt his vast superiority over ourselves from an intellectual point of view, and that it is a gross injustice that such vast numbers of our Indian brethren are outside the pale and with no voice in the constitution or government of their country. Such earnestness, eloquence and clearness displayed by Mr. Bannerjea in his appeal for simple justice for his countrymen, will, I feel sure, soon be crowned

with glorious success, as it is my most earnest wish.

. . . .

At the very first meeting held at Central Finsbury under the Presidency of Sir William Wedderburn, Mr. Bannerjea explained the scope of his mission in the following words, which to-day are full of interest and significance. He said :—

"Ladies and gentlemen, you may possibly want to know from me what it is we want ; what is the question to which above all others we assign the foremost place—what is the chief plank in our platform ? questions we I think I shall best discharge my duty by telling you in a few brief concise terms.

WHAT IT IS WE DO NOT WANT

because we have been credited with a great many things for which we do not deserve credit. Our trade-mark has been put upon a number of articles which really do not belong to us. (Laughter). Let me say at once very distinctly and very emphatically on my own behalf and on behalf of the Indian National Congress, on behalf of the educated community throughout India, that

WE DO NOT WISH TO SEE INSTALLED IN OUR MIDST ANYTHING LIKE A DEMOCRATIC FORM OF GOVERNMENT.

We do not think India is ripe for it yet; nor do we want Home Rule, though if we did I am sure a great many Englishmen would sympathise with us. (Hear, hear). We want something even much less than an English House of Commons, and therefore with the assurance of absolute confidence we appeal to the generous sympathies and the warm support of all sections, and all classes of the English community, Liberals and Conservatives, Whigs and Tories, whatever may be the character and the complexion of their political faith. We take our stand upon one of those maxims which you have taught us—"No taxation without representation." (Cheers.) And we press for the reform of the Legislative Councils which impose the taxes and make the laws. Our Councils are absolute, utter, unqualified, unmitigated shams. I use very strong language ; I use it advisedly and deliberately, with a full sense of the responsibility I incur. I say, once again that our Councils

are absolute shams. The members are all nominated by the Government. Not one of them owes his seat to the suffrages of the people, or to the confidence or esteem of his fellow-countrymen. Not one of them has the right to ask a single question of the Executive Government with reference to any matter of finance or with reference to any matter of administration, foreign or domestic. Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you what would you think of your Parliament if all the members thereof were nominees of the Crown passed under the seal of the Lord Chancellor of England, if they were shorn of all their useful and varied functions; if there was no opposition worth the name, if their debates were of a formal and academic character; if their conclusions were foregone conclusions which did not even serve to test the strength of the rival parties. Our members are indebted for their seats to the Government, and they look forward to their renomination by the Government. I ask: Is it possible for men thus constituted to say anything which would be in opposition to the views and the opinions of the Executive Government? It is not in human nature to rise to such heights of

self-denial, and our Councillors after all are human beings. They are not angels, emanations of the all-beautious mind. The result is that laws are passed which would never be passed in any other country, except under strong protest and remonstrance. Therefore it is, that we press for this reform."

The delegates were introduced to Mr. Gladstone who was kind enough to give them an interview. It may not be out of place to give below a summary of the report which must interest all.

" Mr. Bannerjea spoke of the thirty or more meetings he and others had addressed in various parts of England and Scotland, respecting which Mr. Gladstone asked a number of questions. Before, however, this phase of the movement was discussed fully, Mr. Hume explained to Mr. Gladstone the Congress position and what were its proposals, particularly in regard to the Muhammadan opposition. This latter, indeed, Mr. Gladstone himself brought to the front, characteristically seizing upon the central point of the Reform movement so far as it may affect the proceedings

in Parliament. Mr. Hume was able to give Mr. Gladstone most assuring information on this point while it was pressed upon him that there was no ethnographical difference between Hindus and Muhammadans, that there was little likelihood of any serious troubles existing between them. With very slight exceptions, indeed, the followers of the Prophet, it was stated, were Hindus who had been converted to Moslemism and who because of their conversion, had not ceased to be Hindus. This point evidently impressed Mr. Gladstone; he signified special interest in it, and recurred to it more than once. Conversation then turned again to the existing situation and the course to be taken.

"I congratulate you, gentlemen," said Mr. Gladstone, "on the interest which is taken in your subject. I do not consider the political tone of the present day is anything like so good as it was in the past, not so good as it was forty or fifty years ago. But, even then, consider what would have been thought of a proposal to grant, in however mild a degree, representative institutions to India!"

Mr. Hume mentioned the views of Lord Dufferin and Lords Lansdowne, whilst another of the party pointed out that in February last five out of six of the rulers of India were alleged to be in favour of the adoption of the elective principle.

To Mr. Hume's statement, Mr. Gladstone had said, "Yes, it is most remarkable that four Viceroys should have expressed themselves in favour of this proposal." (The third and fourth Viceroys alluded to, were evidently Lord Northbrook and Lord Ripon). The further remark rather puzzled him "Five out of six," he asked, "who are they ?" Upon the names of Lord Lansdowne, Sir Stewart Bayley, Lord Reay, Lord Connemara, and Sir Auckland Colvin being mentioned, he said, "Ah ! you are referring to subordinate Governors too. What I had in mind was Viceroys only. It is very remarkable that there should be such unanimity.

"Do you expect any Conservatives to vote for the elective principle ?" Mr. Gladstone enquired.

"No" was the reply ; "or, at least, not more than half-a-dozen. Sir Richard Temple, Sir Albert

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Rollit, and a few others may vote for Mr. Bradlaugh's amendment. Certainly, not more than ten or a dozen Conservatives at most will support it."

"And the Dissentient Liberals? How do they stand on this matter?"

Again, the reply was of an unsatisfactory character. It ran somewhat to this effect. Little or no aid could be hoped for from the Dissentients, with the exception of Mr. Caine, who was most heartily with the movement. (Here Mr. Gladstone signified special interest, adding that Mr. Caine occupied an independent position with respect to the party). As to Mr. Chamberlain, he had made no secret of his intention to do all he could to defeat the projects of the Congress. He had even gone so far as to say that he might speak against Mr. Bradlaugh's motion, which, by the way, it was remarked, dealt only with the principle of election, leaving details—the how much or how little—to be considered in Committee. No, it was added, there was nothing to be hoped for from the Dissentient Liberals. Mr. Goschen's statements, exactly three weeks ago at Northampton, afforded another example of the tendency of

Dissentient opinion. Mr. Digby then described, in brief terms, Mr. Goschen's attempt to associate agitators for Indian Reform with Irish-American Leaguers, and the complete failure which had attended his efforts.

Mr. Gladstone's comment on this review of the situation was as follows : " Well, it seems you must be prepared to wait a little longer for the realization of your hopes. You will have to wait a while."

Agreement with this was expressed, and it was remarked that postponement was the only thing feared ; the cause was a winning one, and must certainly succeed.

In 1895 Mr. Bannerjea was voted to the Presidency of the Congress held at Poona. The Congress of that year was held under circumstances of exceptional difficulty and there was not a little anxiety felt among Congressmen about carrying the session through with the least possible friction. Strange enough the difficulties were nothing more than personal. There was wanting among Poona Congressmen that hearty co-operation and mutual good will which alone could bring a movement of that kind to success ; the quarrel was over a

petty affair. Ever since the Social Conference was started as an adjunct of the Indian National Congress, the Congress Pandal used to be lent for holding the Conference meetings. It was hoped by the social reform party in Poona that the usual privilege would be accorded that year too. But unfortunately the orthodox party was strong in Poona and was animated by a spirit of cantankerousness which their compatriots elsewhere were too high-minded to exhibit. The orthodox party was headed by Mr. Tilak and he brought his influence to bear against allowing the Conference being held in the pandal. Party feeling ran high, mutual recriminations reached a high pitch. If both the parties persisted, there was every chance of even the Congress being wrecked. There were wild rumours afloat about setting even the Congress pandal on fire, should it be lent to the reformers. But for the timely intercession of the late Mr. Ranade, the very thing feared would have come to pass. To preside over a Congress that met under such stormy circumstances, to restore amity and concord among men whose feelings had run to fever heat, and bring the Congress to a successful close, required on

small resourcefulness, patience, tact and perseverance. It required a popular hero of enchanting eloquence and winning and graceful manners to perform that task. That the eleventh Congress proved a tremendous success, attended as it was by a much larger gathering than ever before, was due to the personality of Mr. Bannerjea.

Of the speech that he delivered on the occasion, lasting as it did for full three hours, and delivered without once referring to the notes, it is hardly necessary to say anything; it must be read in full to be appreciated properly. But in view of the aspersions cast upon him by certain evil-minded persons, who would impeach his loyalty, we take leave to quote the following from the magnificent peroration. In concluding the speech he said:—

" We feel that if political freedom, in the sense in which it is enjoyed by Britsh subjects elsewhere, is not to be our lot, it will be the inheritance of those who coming after us, will bear our names and carry on our work. In that faith we work. In that faith we ask others to work. It is the faith which is the cement of the Congress movement. It implies confidence in the progressive character of British rule. It implies confidence

in ourselves. Let it not be said that this confidence is misplaced. Let it not be said that the enthusiasm which animated us in the first days of Congress movement is on the wane. The past ought to encourage us. The future ought to stir us into enthusiasm. The noblest heritage which we can leave to our children and our children's children is the heritage of enlarged rights, safeguarded by the loyal devotion and the fervent enthusiasm of an emancipated people. Let us so work with confidence in each other, with unwavering loyalty to the British connection, that we may accomplish this great object within a measurable distance of time. Then will the Congress have fulfilled its mission—justified the hopes of those who founded it, and who worked for it—not, indeed, by the supersession of British rule in India, but by broadening its basis, liberalizing its spirit, ennobling its character, and placing it upon the unchangeable foundations of a nation's affections. It is not severance that we look forward to—but unification, permanent embodiment as an integral part of that great Empire which has given the rest of the world the models of free institutions—that is what we aim at.

But permanence means assimiliation, incorporation, equal rights, equal privileges. Permanence is incompatible with any form of military despotism, which is a temporary makeshift adapted to a temporary purpose. England is the august mother of free nations. She has covered the world with free States. Places, hitherto the chosen abode of barbarism, are now the home of freedom. Wherever floats the flag of England there free Governments have been established, We appeal to England gradually to change the character of her rule in India, to liberalise it to shift its foundations, to adopt it to the newly-developed environments of the country and the people, so that, in the fulness of time, India may find its place in the great confederacy of free States, English in their origin, English in their character, English in their institution, rejoicing in their permanent and indissoluble union with England, a glory to the mother-country, and an honour to the human race. Then will England have fulfilled her great mission in the East, accomplished her high destiny among nations, repaid the long-standing debt which the West owes to the East and covered herself with imperishable renown and everlasting glory."

We now come to another and more onerous duty which took him to England for the fourth time, and that was to give evidence before the Welby Commission. The commission was appointed with a view to investigating the growth of expenditure and after taking a lot of evidence from retired public servants like Lord Northbook, Sir Auckland Colvin, Sir David Barbour and the Indian representatives, Messrs. D. E. Wacha, Gokhale, G. Subramania Iyer and Surendranath Bannerjea came to an insufferably poor conclusion. All that the Commission could recommend was the grant by the British Treasury of only a quarter of a million per year, for the grave financial injustice to which we have been for long subjected by the War Office. But if the conclusions to which the Welby Commission came were so partial and unjust, it was certainly not due to the fact that the Indian case was not well put before them. The evidence given by the four Indian representatives each in his own way was valuable, and their collective testimony must have weighed considerably with a more favourably disposed commission.

On the question of the machinery for the control of expenditure, Mr. Bannerjea made the following recommendations:—

1. "Members of the Legislative Councils should have the right of moving amendments and dividing the Council with regard to items in the Budget; and the Bud getsshould be laid sufficiently early before the Councils to facilitate discusssion.

2. "A Committee of the House of Commons should be appointed to look into Indian accounts.

3. "One Member of the India Council in London should be elected by the non-official members of the Supreme Legislative Council for each of the three Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay, and Madras.

4. "Periodical enquiries by Royal Commissions or Parlimentary Committees would promote the ends of economy and good Government."

It is impossible to bring within the short compass of a sketch all the varied activities of a man whose whole life has been dedicated to the service of his motherland, but mention must be made of his service as a legislator

and as a city father. It was only in the fitness of things that the man who spoke so largely on the question of the expansion of the Legislative Councils, should on the passing of the Act of 1892 be sent up to represent them in the Bengal Council by a grateful constituency. From 1894 he continued to sit in the Council either as a representative of the Corporation of Calcutta or for the District Boards of the Presidency Division. His services were considered to be so valuable by Sir John Woodburn that on the occasion of the discussion of the Calcutta Municipal Bill, the Lieutenant-Governor accorded once again the privilege of sending a representative to the District Boards which nominated Mr. Bannerjea. He made a staunch fight against the Municipal Bill and though he was defeated, his cause has been sufficiently vindicated by the subsequent history of the corporation. Mr. Bannerjea was one of the twenty-eight members of the Calcutta Corporation who resigned in a body as a protest against the Act, though it might be questioned how far the boycott has succeeded in improving the Municipal administration of the "City of Palaces." Mr. Bannerjea stood thrice for

a seat in the Supreme Legislative Council, but he was defeated twice by the Maharajah of Durbhanga and once by Dr. Ashutosh Mukerjee.

So far we have recorded the facts of a memorable career over which posterity at all events can pronounce but one opinion, that of cordial approbation. We now enter a stage on which, we are afraid, that verdict will not be unanimous—the Partition and its after-math. The incidents connected with that unhappy measure are too recent to be dealt with exhaustively. But Mr. Bannerjea has done so much in organising opposition to that measure that we cannot pass over it. Lord Curzon recently protested in the House of Lords that he was not responsible for the final shaping of the Partition measure, and sought to father it upon Lord Ampthill. But Lord Amphtill was prompt in disavowing it and Lord Middleton more than hinted that the measure was entirely the handiwork of that arch political craftsman Lord Curzon. The shabby attempt he made to shift the blame upon others can only be equalled by the mischievousness of the motive which inspired the measure. It was undeniably to divide the

Bengalees from the Mahomedans, to make their interests appear as if they were different and separate, to break the influence of the Bangalees and shift a portion of the influence of Calcutta to the old Moslem capital of Decca. The intellectuals of Bengal naturally took it as an affront to their growing feeling of national consolidation and protested against it. The lead in that protest was undoubtedly given to Mr. Bannerjea, the foremost Bengalee patriot living. He had already fought a thousand battles for the Bengalees with undaunted courage, self-sacrifice, and devotion and created a new life and awakened a new consciousness among the Bengali-speaking race. He has been the pillar of the political movement in Bengal, the inspirer and guide of the entire political life of the Bengalees. The dry bones of the valley he had made instinct with life. How could he fail to take the lead in a battle which if left unfought would leave the Bengalee speaking race divided, discredited and hopelessly effeminate? It is impossible to count the number of speeches he has delivered and the innumerable men he has converted to the anti-Partition movement.

At first it was all smooth sailing. No government could be shaken by public meetings or newspaper articles, however numerous the one and reasoned and plaintive the other may be ; least of all the Government of India, given as they are, to ignore both of them completely. If the attention of the Government were to be drawn at all to the grievances of the people, it must be due to pressure from elsewhere. The best way of rousing the conscience of the British people was to "boycott" their goods; and make them feel that their indifference to popular wishes would no longer "pay." One morning therefore somebody said "boycott" and the advice was taken up immediately. Mr. Bannerjea put himself at the head of the boycott movement and has been unceasingly advising his countrymen to boycott British goods. He sees no difference between "swadeshi" and "boycott." He believes the one is only the positive and the other the negative side of the same truth. Bare-footed and clad in Swadeshi cloths, he has been going about his country oft and anon, like the religious mendicants of old, preaching the gospel of swadeshism and asking his countrymen to abstain

from purchasing foreign commodities. It will be out of place in this sketch to examine the tenets too closely and see whether "boycott" can succeed and whether it will prove in the long run a beneficial and wise measure. Suffice it to say that Mr. Bannerjea as a high priest of swedeshism sees in it nothing but unalloyed good.

From the gospel of boycotting British goods, to that of boycotting everything British,—even offices under the British Government is only a short step, and the more ardent disciples of this political Rishi began to preach the doctrine of absolute independence. A new school of politicians sprang up in Bengal who began to preach the doctrine of absolute *Swaraj* and who carried the theory of passive resistance to its legitimate conclusion. Its manifestations first attracted wide notice at the Calcutta Congress. But it began to thrust itself more promienently soon after, and culminated in the Surat imbroglio. The extremist party, as the party of absolute swaraj came to be called, wanted to capture the Congress at Nagpur, but when the venue had to be changed to Surat, they did their best to achieve the same end at Surat. The political convictions

of Mr. Bannerjea, who always resisted violence and revolution, startled many Englishmen, for they believed him to be an Extremist. But he confessed himself to be a Moderate, willing to do obeisance to British rule, and opposed to any revolutionary propaganda. "The Congress is dead," he cried, " Long live the Congress." He signed the Convention creed along with a majority of his countrymen. The following words which he has used quite recently show definetely his political convictions which it will be found, have not changed from the views he propounded as President of the Eleventh Session of the Congress :—

" To day we stand face to face with one of the gravest crises in our history ; and the question arises, what should we do ? Should we pause and cry halt in the midst of our patriotic labours? In the midst of the deepening gloom, should the mariner cast anchor and wait for the dispersion of the dark clouds which are rolling by; or should he pursue his course in the full confidence that under divine guidance the clouds will roll away and the ship will reach the haven of safety ? I shall be no party to the dropping of the anchor, to the cessation of those patriotic

endeavours to which some of us have dedicated our lives. *Carry on the old work in accordance with the old traditions and upon the old consitutional lines in which we have absolute and implicit faith.* Legality is our motto, self-government as it prevails in the Colonies our goal; organization our method; and 'Swadeshi'—the great instrument of our industrial and political regeneration. I do not believe in Revolution; I believe in evolution; I do not believe in sudden and violent changes, but in steady growth and expansion culminating in the attainment of a new life and development in which the old and the new shall find their places, the old adapting itself to the new, and the new to the old."

The question will no doubt be asked and has been asked by many whether Mr. Bannerjea has been pursuing the right path and is consistent with his own principles in electing to carry on the propaganda of Swadeshism and boycott and whether he would not do better to allow it to be taken up by others and change the scene of his labours to England. Suppose, some ask, that Mr. Bannerjea had headed a deputation to England and addressed English audiences, would he not have served his country better ?

The question is one which cannot be answered off hand; but it is not possible to answer it entirely in favour of Mr. Bannerjea's present attitude. No one is better acquainted with the grievances of Bengal than Mr. Bannerjea, and no one can better persuade English audiences than he. The one fault of the British electorate is that they do not know what is passing in India; they want to be enlightened. Mr. Bannerjea has implicit confidence in their love of justice and fair play. If so, it stands to reason that a campaign in England would clear the air very much. The late Prime Minister and the present Secretary of State for India pledged themselves to reconsider the question of the partition if only fresh facts were advanced. No attempt has been made to put forth fresh facts before them. The difficulties of the British Parliament and of Viscount Morley are that they do not *know* the facts. And it is the prime duty of Indian public men to let them know. What organised steps have been taken by the Bengalees to let the authorities in England know the truth? Echo answers what? A heavy responsibility lies upon constitutional reformers who believe in the justice of Britishers, and yet

will not take steps to convince them of the justice of their grievances.

We must now conclude. We have given a hasty summary of the chief events in the life and career of a man who is certainly a maker of Modern Indian history. There are many more points in his life and lifework which deserve notice. His attitude towards social reform and his religious convictions have not been touched upon. But Mr. Bannerjea is known and respected more as a politician than as a social or a religious reformer. That he cares as much for these aspects of life, no one who knows him will doubt; but politics has been the breath of his life, the very food he lives upon. To the political up-lifting of his people he has devoted his life. Nay more. At an age when one may be expected to retire from his activities, he has taken the leadership of a movement which is most exacting in its duties. That he may live long enough to enjoy some at least of the fruits of his labours is the fervent prayer of all who love and admire his strenuous work and devout patriotism.

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